

Transcribed by Liz King, February 2001

This is an interview with Mr. Hugh Colton, attorney at law, at the Colton Law Office, Main Street, Vernal, Utah, on the eighteenth day of December, 1978. My name is Mike Brown, of the Golden Age Center, Vernal, Utah. The subject of the interview is the Echo Park Dam controversy.

Mike Brown (MB): Well, you said your earliest remembrances were with your brother, Don B.?

Hugh Colton (Hugh): I was with my brother, Don B., who was in the House of Representatives for twelve years. And Mr. Kimball, and I'm sorry I don't know more about him, but he actually, in talking to my brother about this, and my brother to him, was the first time I ever heard of the possibility of a Colorado River development.

MB: Was this like back in the twenties, thirties, around in there?

Hugh: Yes, likely in 1920. Then, that – you know, it didn't mean much to me at that time, but later on, that was the first time I ever heard any mention made of development of the Colorado River. Then in the twenties and thirties, I was away in school, other activities, from Vernal, for nine years. Then after finishing law school I came back here in 1928 or '29. And then to begin with, the Vernal Lion's Club was acting as a chamber of commerce. It was the only civic club we had, you know. They became concerned about getting with this thing. Then we organized the Vernal Chamber of Commerce, and from then until now it's been one of the principal promotional activities. On this water development committee, we began moving out. Frank Ward was the first secretary, and he wrote the...

MB: So you said that Frank Ward wrote some kind of pamphlet?

Hugh: Yes. It was called "Utah's Last Water Hole," and designed primarily to say : "Let's get with it."

MB: So is this like the Echo Park Dam, or the whole project?

Hugh: The whole project. Echo Park Dam was then the most imminent possibility, and should have been done. But the so-called do-gooders beat us on that one. That would have been the granddaddy of all dams. We were ? but the nature lovers ? so we settled for Flaming Gorge.

MB: Well, when did you first start getting involved specifically with Echo Park? Now, was this like in the late forties, somewhere around there?

Hugh: Yes. Well, you see, prior to World War II, we had... I think this publication may have been before then, because we had been there... I left here in the military service, expecting to be gone a year. Five years later, and one war later, I got back home. And then this thing – that was in 1946. And then we became... we really, of course, naturally this community should be given the credit for starting this whole thing.

We first got active in the state, Bry Stringham then was in the legislature, we got these

twenty-one counties to go in with our county. Twenty other counties. And got the thing on a state level. And then we organized the four states, and Utah promoted that. We then brought in Wyoming and Colorado, and New Mexico. And had two representatives from each state on an Upper Colorado River organization. Out of that we developed the idea of what they call the Aqualanties. An idea that came from the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Denver. Going back to the old vigilantes.

MB: The Aqualanties.

Hugh: The purpose of that organization was to get a four-state united approach on it, and to raise money. We sold these little Aqualantie badges. We wanted mass participation, with the idea that each community would sell these badges for one to ten dollars. We had a limit of a hundred dollars on it. But we concentrated on the small contributions, and raised eighty-six thousand bucks.

MB: Wow! Four states.

Hugh: To promote this thing.

MB: Was this for lobbying money?

Hugh: Yes, publications, whatever. And then with this four-state organization, we went in 1956... Now there, of course, were four or five years prior to that when the build-up had been made. But we had the—bill passed the House. No. The bill was to be *presented* to the House, and then the Senate. The Senate was, we felt, with us. And they were. But we then got delegations from all of these different states, to converge on Washington, in what amounted to a door-to-door campaign, preceding the time this bill was to be voted on. We had, from Utah, eighty-four people, with few exceptions, everybody paying their own way back there. We stayed two weeks. During that time we went to every congressman that would let us in, and there were only two that didn't, presented our cause, from a grass-roots viewpoint, and when they voted on the bill, why, that's when it was passed, in 1956.

MB: Now, you were in that group, that went to Washington?

Hugh: I was the chairman of the four-state committee, and also of the Utah delegation. We met every morning. To show you how concerned we were, we had a six-thirty meeting every morning, where each one of the workers, and they were all working, was assigned definite assignments as to what to do that day, and we'd report back the next morning. We had the entire United States House of Representatives catalogued, and we put them according to how they'd vote.

MB: It seems like there was a lot of organization that went into that, before you even went to Washington.

Hugh: Oh, yes. All of this Aqualantie thing. We first organized Utah, then we got the four states involved. We had a four-state committee, consisting of two people from each state. Last time, I represented Utah, and I was made chairman of the four-state committee. Then when we got into the actual work on the thing, I was chairman of the Utah committee. The dedication of the people was

terrific. We had with us in that group, George D. Clyde, who later became governor because of his water activity. He was in after the reorganization of the Utah Water and Power Board. We brought him in, perhaps the most eminent authority on water in the west. Certainly in Utah. We brought him into the Water and Power Board. By then the Water and Power Board, of course, was full. They had to work on this specific project, getting it by the Congress, which was completed in April of 1956, when the bill finally became law. It involved traveling to Arlington, New Mexico, with a delegation, to Denver, Grand Junction, Colorado, to Cheyenne and Laramie, Wyoming, and many, many months of work in Utah. But Utah, because of the impetus that was put back of it by the Vernal Chamber of Commerce, why, they became somewhat a leader of the four-state organization. While Utah's percentage was only twenty-three percent of the water, Colorado had a little more than fifty percent, Wyoming was twelve percent, and New Mexico had ten or eleven percent. It was big business for all of these states, no matter what their interest was. We had this perfect unity and support from all of these different people.

MB: Did you make more than one trip to Washington?

Hugh: Oh, I must have made ten.

MB: Ten? Connected with Echo Park?

Hugh: Well, not Echo Park. Connected with the Colorado River Project. See, we were hoping for Echo Park, but the nature lovers, the so-called nature lovers, this developed early. It wasn't until it was pretty well understood that Echo Park would not be constructed and we had taken second-best, Flaming Gorge, which actually was the dam site, what was called originally and was designated by these investigators as Ashley Falls, named after Ashley. Well, we wanted to put a little color into it, so Flaming Gorge was upstream quite a little ways, when we took that name. Just like we did on Red Fleet.

MB: What were your feelings about having to make that sacrifice: Echo Park for Flaming Gorge?

Hugh: Well, Flaming Gorge was better than nothing. It's real interesting, the people who opposed any river development now assume the role of owning Flaming Gorge Reservoir and whatever. I mean, it's a wonderful thing. Echo Park would have been all that Flaming Gorge is and more, too. Much larger power plant, and all of the things that Flaming Gorge has, wonderful lake, fishery, recreational area. But the recreationalists really get more benefit out of it than anyone else today. I mean from the day-to-day use of it.

MB: I'm told that an advantage of Echo Park would have been it would have irrigated some of our arid land out there.

Hugh: Um-hum. That's true. Eventually, you could put it this way: the plan was on Flaming Gorge, eventually there would be a tunnel come from Flaming Gorge out to the edge of the Uinta Basin, and make irrigation water available. Whether that will ever be accomplished or not, I don't know.

MB: Did you ever have any involvement with the Sierra Club people? Did you know them, or -?

Hugh: I knew them quite well. They are nice people. As far as members of the Sierra Club, for instance, the head of the National Park Service in Washington then was U.S. Grant III, who was a personal friend of mine. I worked for him in Washington before. Nearly three years as Secretary of the Public Buildings Commission. A very fine gentleman, but had never been in this area. In talking to him and explaining to him what it meant to those of us who live here 365 days a year, as compared with him, who had never even been here, and never was prior to his death, and I said to him, "Why do you oppose this sort of thing, when the people who are there on the ground, live there year in and year out, are so strong for it?" And the only answer he could give me was, "Well, you don't understand." But he is just one example of great men, who, in my opinion, were mistaken about the overall purpose, the overall benefits, where you've got to consider the benefits and weigh that against the opposite, to determine whether or not this is for the best good of the greatest number of people in the United States. Here these people were, the Audubon Society, for instance, with its principal membership east of the Mississippi River, were opposed to it from one end to the other. And people who, in my opinion, just didn't understand what would come out of it.

MB: Was there much opposition with the local river-runners, for the dam?

Hugh: No. I don't know of any. The grandfather, as far as I know, of what you'd call local river-runners, was Bus Hatch, and Bus Hatch and Frank Swain and Willis Morley and I went through the downriver, the first time I ever went down the river, in two boats that Bus and Willis Morley, his brother-in-law, had made, and that's the most interesting trip I ever took down the river, although I'd been down it twenty or twenty-five times. But that was before any of this was thought of.

MB: So, you enjoyed running the river yourself, even before the dam, right?

Hugh: Right. For many years. And with Bus Hatch, I must have gone through about four or five times before we got onto the modern way of doing it. Then I've come through several more times with his son. I think the most thrilling trip I ever took down the river was with Bus's son, Ted, who now runs and owns the business, and we went through with an outboard motor. He and I and a good friend of mine named Bill Marriott, who is quite a prominent businessman of the nation, owns the Marriott Hotels. We used several propellers going down, but we had a lot of thrills. Actually the best definition I ever heard of a thrill is a right damn good scare. We had them. This was a light boat and I'm sure of times off the water, five to eight feet, but these Hatch boys were real rivermen.

MB: Were you ever involved with the Secretary of the Interior on this Echo Park Dam dealings?

Hugh: Oh, yes, we met frequently with the Bureau of Reclamation director. And on, oh, I can recall at least three different occasions when we would go to the Secretary of the Interior, who was favorable, or we wouldn't have what we have now.

MB: Just out of curiosity, can you remember the testimony or the person Dr. Fraizer? What can you tell me about him?

Hugh: Well, Dr. Fraizer, in my opinion, was a real lover of the outdoor, and, I think, head of the state

organization on wildlife resources. He was a real naturalist and worked. Incidentally, I became acquainted with him through this Frank Swain who used to run the river, a Vernal fellow who went to work for Kennecott Copper and there, because of an interest in outdoor life, became acquainted with Dr. Fraizer and brought him to Vernal on many boat trips and other occasions. When we were first back in Washington to present our viewpoint to the Committee, Dr. Fraizer went with us. He testified as to the benefits that would come to nature lovers through the construction of Echo Park Dam.

Now, this Dr. Fraizer, and his testimony, I'll never forget. He told the Appropriations Committee and the Committee working on this bill, the Interior and the Affairs Committee, that going down the river and holding on to these boats to keep in 'em, but you didn't have an opportunity to see the beauties of our canyons. And frankly, words can't tell people about it, you've got to see it to believe it. He said with Mammoth Lake, people would then be in a position to sit in a boat and look up and he said those canyons were never made to look down into, but be in the bottom and look up to enjoy fully the beauties that are there. There are places, and he described this in words that are out of this world. Places where those cliffs go almost straight up, three thousand feet, and there's no way you can see those, peeking over from the top looking down in, but the way to do it would be to have a body of water, still water, there, where you could then look up as the good Lord intended us to do. His testimony.

MB: That's what I was told, that he was just an absolute master of the English language.

Hugh: And he knew what to say, as well as knowing how to say it.

MB: Do you remember Dr. Bratis?

Hugh: Yes.

MB: Can you tell me anything about him?

Hugh: I didn't know him like I knew Dr. Fraizer. But he, too, was favorable to Echo Park Dam. I knew of him. I think I met him a time or two, but I never was personally acquainted with him like I was with Dr. Fraizer.

MB: Was Untermann ever with you out there?

Hugh: Ernest? Ernest Untermann?

MB: Yes, I'm sorry, I called him his nickname. Yes, Ernie Untermann.

Hugh: Oh, he was one hundred percent with us, all the time. He went to Washington with us, both he and his wife, Billie, both of whom are eminent geologists. They testified, both of them, from a scientific viewpoint, and, in my opinion, gave very valuable testimony as to the need for Echo Park Dam and eventually Flaming Gorge.

MB: Are there any men that stick out particularly in your mind from all the work you did back in

Washington?

Hugh: Oh, yes. Certainly Senator A.B. Watkins, who was very active there, and worked untiringly for years on this project. Then Governor George D. Clyde, who came into it as I explained to you, and became very active. Bry Stringham, from Vernal, here, and then from Wyoming, and the state engineer of Wyoming. Oh, of course, Senator Watkins and Senator Bennett, Senator Wallace Bennett.

MB: Were you well acquainted with Senator Watkins?

Hugh: Very well. Senator Watkins came back to Vernal from law school about 1916. He was an active disciple of Theodore Roosevelt and while in New York was imbued with the idea of the Boy Scout movement, and came to Vernal and started it. Organized the first Boy Scout troop in the Uintah Basin.

MB: Watkins did?

Hugh: Yes. And I was a member of that troop.

MB: You were just a boy then.

Hugh: We have a lot of close family ties. His parents and my parents were both pioneers here and close friends. He and one of my brothers played basketball together at BYU and then later and he and my brother, Don, were law partners at one time. In fact, because of this Boy Scout troop, I became intimately acquainted with him, and our friendship was ? until he died.

MB: Do you know Aspenall of Colorado?

Hugh: Yes. Very well, from the Colorado end, very influential. And [he] was chairman of this Internal Affairs Committee. He guided and promoted this bill from one end to the other.

MB: Was there any California...?

Hugh: Governor J. Bracken Lee approved the appointment of George D. Clyde as director of the Utah Water Power Board, of which I mentioned I was a member, and Mr. Charlie Rapp from Utah ? LaSalle, and I approached the governor, about appointing George D. Clyde as director of the Water and Power Board, at a salary of more than what the Governor was making. But he did it.

MB: That's very open-minded.

Hugh: Well, one of the basic movements, I think, was necessary to get this thing moving. I knew Eldridge G. Thomas well, he was a professor of mine at the University of Utah. I knew Governor Johnson, the Senator from Colorado who helped no end on this.

MB: How about a fellow named Wallace Stegner? Did you ever meet him out there?

MB: There's something I've heard of, I don't know, but I'm under the impression that there were California interests in this whole deal.

Hugh: Mr. Goodrich was the State Engineer of Wyoming and on this four-state committee. Senator Millecam, from Colorado, was very influential and helpful in this. Wes Hamilton was very helpful to us in Salt Lake. General Grant I've told you about. I worked with General Grant for three years as secretary. He was the executive officer of the Public Buildings Commission. And I worked with him as secretary of that commission when they formulated and adopted the plan to develop the area in Washington between Pennsylvania Avenue and the Mall, which is known as the Triangle, which is now completely covered, according to the plan which was made during those years, with the wonderful Government buildings.

MB: Have you been back there recently?

Hugh: Yes. I'll be back there the 28th now.

MB: That's where most of my family is from.

Hugh: Oh, Washington?

MB: My grandfather was a chief civil service examiner at the Bureau of Standards about the same time you were back there.

Hugh: Oh, it was Bill Marriott and I started the Hot Shops, now the Marriott Corporation. We each brought two thousand bucks to start it, and last year that corporation took in more than a billion dollars. My son is his chief counsel now. His son is getting married, and I'm going back there on July 28th. Yes, I was there last fall, I go back quite often. ? Jones was, or became during the time we're talking about, the chairman of the Water and Power Board. He and Charlie Rapp, both of whom went to Washington with us. And Frank Whorter, I mentioned him, and Tom Jensen, all through the years, was secretary of the Utah Water Users Association, very helpful in organizing the entire state of Utah, he came back with us. George Pugh was a lawyer up at Craig, that helped a great deal on that, along with Senator Johnson, or Governor Johnson. And then down in New Mexico we had the Governor, and heavens, I know him as – Tom, who later became governor of New Mexico, he was a real character, and made every trip that was made, representing New Mexico.

MB: I thought you might remember a few of those men there. Tell me, was there any California interests in this. You know, I've heard here and there that –

Hugh: Well, very much so.

MB: Politically, I mean.

Hugh: Yes, but so long as the water did run down the Colorado, and continues to run down, California gets it.

MB: I'm thinking about power, too.

Hugh: They had to come along because they were interested in so many reclamation projects that they couldn't afford to get the other western states [as] adversaries. When the final showdown [came], they, I think, the majority of them, voted for it. But Congressman Rhodes, who was then a freshman in Congress, was very influential, from Arizona, in helping on this. He's now a minority leader in the House of Representatives. He was very helpful. And, oh, people who had a hand in helping us are so numerous you couldn't mention them.

MB: I was thinking in terms of opposition.

Hugh: We didn't have any open opposition from any western state. They were all together because they are wrapped up in the same bundle.

MB: Let me ask you this one more question. Were you acquainted with David Brower? David R. Brower? Did you work with him very much?

Hugh: Well, I didn't work with him, because he was opposed to everything we were for.

MB: Did you know the man very well, did you meet with him? Can you tell me anything about him or about him at the time?

Hugh: No. Whatever he did was adverse to what we were working for. We recognized that and that was it.

END OF TAPE.